

# When Tomorrow Comes

Pink petals danced along the wind. A girl wearing a new uniform stretched her hand, catching a falling petal on her palm. This girl with long, black hair scattered behind her and with white skin was I, Sawako Kuronuma. Today was the day I had longed for a long time. I couldn't help feeling excited. It was the opening ceremony of middle school. This day came at last. Since a few years ago, I had been longing for this day I would be going into middle school. Both excited and anxious, I hadn't had a good sleep yesterday night. After all, I hadn't made any intimate friends in junior school. But I made a promise to myself that I had to make a lot of friends after I enter middle school. If possible, I hope I could befriend everyone in class.

The petals of Sakura blossoms incessantly fell down to my long hair and shoulders. These pitiable heart-shaped petals were, in my eyes, the proof of a prediction of a jovial future.

Having looked at the class designation, I entered my classroom. After I had sat down, tensed, and was looking around, a female classmate sitting beside me began to chat with me in a carefree fashion. I had never seen her, so I guess she had been studying in a different junior school.

"We sit adjacent to each other. Nice to meet you."

"Yes. Nice to meet you too. My name is Sawako Kuronuma."

But before I completed my self-introduction....

"Hey, wait!"

Suddenly another female classmate hurried to us in a panic, and pulled the shoulders of the female classmate I had been talking to.

"Don't talk to her! I heard bad things will happen if you do!" said the girl softly to the female classmate next to me. Though she had lowered her voice, I could

still hear what she had said.

“What? Why?”

“I heard rumours that that girl’s nickname is Sadako<sup>[1]</sup>. I heard she has an abnormal body. If anyone were to offend her, he or she would be cursed.”

This was it. This rumour was what troubling me for ages.

The origins could be dated far ago, when my childhood friend mistakenly called me ‘Sadako’ instead of ‘Sawako’. Though a trivial matter, it ridiculously became convincing because my appearance was terribly alike the ‘Sadako’ in a famous scary movie at that time. Things spread around, and before I knew it, I was being said to have an abnormal body. Although I was a child who liked to play with myself, I still longed for some friends, but unluckily, owing to this rumour, I had never made any friends throughout my junior school days. And it was because of this that I hoped this rumour would disappear once I had entered middle school.

“An abnormal body, you say. Speaking of which, I did feel she was a bit sullen just now.”

The female classmate sitting next to me was still sceptical, but when she looked at me gingerly, I could feel she was less amiable and carefree to me.

Having been a middle school student for a week, I hadn’t yet made any friends. Other classmates had seemed to find comrades with similar interests. They were even preoccupied by jokes and chats during sweeping hours; only I was concentrated on the sweeping work, doing my best to gather the dust on the classroom’s floor.

*It’s so hard to make friends,* I heaved a sigh, and holding the broom, I looked around the classroom. Though stuff like announcements had been taken off, there were, in every corner of the classroom, traces of the previous class. There were doodles and dust on the wall; on a pot, the geranium (plant) had withered; on the book shelf at the end of the classroom stacked disorderly a lot of books, along with torn lecture notes, a sports jacket with its colours faded, all stuffed inside.

*Let me clean and tidy up this place bit by bit,* I thought.

Since junior school, I had always been responsible for the sundry duties in my

class. Aside from reporting to my teacher, I had also done a lot I had discovered I could do. I had never been praised for my work, though. In fact, perhaps no one had paid attention to my work. Be that as it may, I had still kept doing them—it was all for everyone's sake. Besides, doing these chores could make me feel as if I were part of the class despite having no friends.

First, I tidied the bookshelf. Then, I changed the pot for the geranium (plant). While I was at it, I glanced at the cupboard containing the tools for cleaning. A large, silver, square can, perhaps containing the wax for the final cleaning, was carelessly placed on the cupboard. After a few opens and closes of the cupboard, the can had gradually moved to the aisle, its centre of gravity slowly shifting to a nasty state. Just when I began thinking how dangerous it would become, a male student, playing around with another student, knocked into the cupboard, shaking the can.

“The cupboard! Watch out!” crying out loud, I rushed forward, and almost at the exact moment, the can fell down from the cupboard, making a loud noise as it fell on the floor, a noise that shot through the corridor. Bewildered, female students sent out sharp cries.

The male student who knocked into the cupboard widened his eyes and stood at his spot as if he was nailed there. Fortunately, he wasn't even scratched at all.

*Good Gracious* I heaved a sigh of relief, for no one was hurt.

“Sadako had foreseen this

Someone cried, bringing other in echo with him or her. *Foreseen...did they mean I foresaw that the can would fall down?*

“Oh, no. I don't have those powers...”

I didn't have those foreseeing powers they spoke of. I just happened to have seen it, so I would have known. I tried to explain to them, but they wouldn't listen. Everyone was stirred up with emotions and talked to each other incessantly like a relay.

“Was that an act of a ghost?”

“Bother. There's ghosts in this classroom?”

“No, Sadako called it here. That’s why she would have foreseen it.”

“So Sadako told the ghost to do that.”

“What? So the rumour about Sadako is true!”

They jumped to this conclusion in an instant.

W-Why had things ended up into this?

“I-It’s not like this. I don’t have any special powers...”

As I approached one of the classmates, trying to explain to her, she suddenly screamed, ran to a corner. Other students followed her and ran away from me afterwards.

All of a sudden, there was no one around me. As if there was a transparent wall between my classmates and myself, everyone was standing far from me, staring at me, horrified.

This shouldn’t happen. I didn’t mean for this.

However I tried to explain, this episode was heard through all the classes in the same grade on that day.

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Under the dancing sakura petals as well, over a hundred newcomers came to another middle school in the same city.

There were a spate of sports clubs in this school, and the baseball team was the most prominent since it could always win in the district competitions.

In this spring, about ten or so newcomers entered the baseball team, with two of them especially garnering attention. They were Shota Kazehaya and Ryu Sanada. Kazehaya had a bright and straight personality that won others’ love. Sanada was mostly indifferent, making it difficult for others to approach him. The two had different personalities, but their performance at baseball was superb. Not only did they run fast, their actions were swift, their feeds fast and accurate. Anyone could tell they were in a different league from other

newcomers.

It was at the end of May that the baseball clubs from Kazehaya's school and Sawako's school planned to have a training competition.

"So I'm going to release the list of members going to participate in the training competition next Sunday. Don't let your guard down even when this is a training competition. So the pitcher is..."

The club members, who had always listened to the list of participating members from their coach, were in an uproar after the list was released. This was because apart from the second and third graders, Kazehaya and Sanda from the first grade were on the list too.

"How incredible. They could participate in competitions despite only entering the club for a month."

"Sigh. They're strong after all."

The seniors were a bit dejected, yet Kazehaya was unperturbed.

This was his first competition since entering middle school. He had to do his best in this great opportunity. As Kazehaya thought of these, he was full of strength and vigour.

After days of repeated training, the day for the competition arrived before he had noticed it.

Having gathered at their school, the baseball club members went to their opponent's school together. The competition today would be held at their opponent's school.

After the opponent's team was decided to be the first to strike, the competition was launched.

Kazehaya was appointed as the right fielder, and Sanda the left fielder. *Okay, let's go!* Kazehaya pumped his spirits and ran to the defending position with his fastest speed.

During the latter part of the first round, Kazehaya's school won points with third graders who got continuous hits. With this stream of force, the whole competition looked as if their team were in total lead of the other team.

Kazenaya and Sanda had also made hits, especially Sanda's super triple hit that stumped the opponents—they even cried, “I heard that guy's only a first grader!”

At the former part of the ninth round, their scores were 4 to 3. Although Kazenaya's team had been keeping the lead, the third-year pitchers had apparently tired themselves out. The opponent team had never let go of a chance of the weakening balls thrown and made a double hit flatly. Nevertheless, the pitcher worked hard, and the following two hitters stroke rolling balls.

With two strikeouts, runners at the second and third base respectively, it was the fourth hitter. He let the first ball go. Then, he hit the second ball with his utmost strength, and with a crisp sound, the ball flew high and far.

“Kazenaya, the ball is on your side!”

Before the command reached his ears, Kazenaya had already been moving swiftly. The flying ball drew a large arc across the sky, flying farther and farther. Kazenaya predicted the spot the ball would fall and ran to it.

*It's good. I can do it.* Convinced, Kazenaya stretched his left hand; at the same instant, the cloud that had been covering the sun suddenly left, and the dazzling sunlight veiled the ball under the blue sky.

His vision turned completely white. *Where is the ball?*

During the short instant Kazenaya lost track of the ball, the ball had swept its way across Kazenaya's glove with a few inches of distance, falling on the ground.

*How did this happen. I could have easily caught the ball out.* As Kazenaya stared at the ball that seemed to be running its way on the red dirt farther and farther for its life, everything seemed to have turned into an illusion.

The second-year centre fielder dashed out and threw the ball back to the home base, but before the ball went into the catcher's gloves, the runners who had been at the second base and third base had already stepped onto the base bag of the home base.

“Wonderful. We have turned the tables!” The opponent team burst into loud cries of joy.

Although the next hitter got a strikeout, Kazenaya's team didn't score any points in the latter part of the ninth round and lost lamentably by one point.

"If only we hadn't that mistake in the former part of the ninth round."

After the competition, Kazenaya happened to have heard these pessimistic words while he was packing things up. He couldn't help putting down what he have had in his hand.

"Gosh, how could he have made such a terrible mistake?"

"Don't you think that first grader is too haughty?"

The second-year members, though not looking directly at Kazenaya, knew Kazenaya was around and was definitely able to hear what they were saying.

Kazenaya was clear not every senior would be happy that Sanda and him were enlisted in the competition. Still, it was the first time he was being said like that. Perhaps, these seniors were venting the dissatisfaction they had been accumulating for some time all at once at this mistake.

Seeing Kazenaya a bit frozen, Sanda glanced at the second-year seniors and walked to Kazenaya.

"Shota, think nothing of their words," he said to Kazenaya plainly, as usual.

"I know. I don't mind them," Kazenaya replied, with a smile.

He then moved his hands again and continued packing his stuff.

Nevertheless, on his way back home and even after he had gone back home, he couldn't forget the words those seniors had said about him.

Sanda was right that he should pay no mind to those sarcastic words, but the scene of the ball rolling rapidly on the floor because of his failure in catching the ball was still stained deeply in his mind.

'Haughty'—the reason why this word would pierce through his heart was perhaps it really got into his weaknesses. Though he didn't intentionally express his haughtiness, there might be a corner in his heart storing some arrogance: *I have earned some experience in my baseball team beforehand, so it's normal that I'm stronger than my seniors and enlisted in the competition first.*

Having finished dinner, Kazenaya continued to think of this in his room. Suddenly, raindrops hit on the roof, interrupting his thought. He opened the window, and the sounds of raindrops increased, bringing along damp air particles into his room.

“It’s raining.”

He wished tomorrow and even the day after tomorrow would still be raining. That way, the club activities would be postponed—though, he was shocked that such a thought would come out from him.

When he was in his previous baseball team, playing baseball was exhilarating. Although he had complained about the trainings in the hot weather, or cried in lamentation when he lost a match, those times had always been jovial. Back then, he was excited and thrilled to know what would await him in the baseball team in middle school.

The rain poured stronger. Kazenaya stared silently at the raindrops, which, under the streetlamps, fleeted like transparent, glowing thin lines.

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On the next morning, Sawako, bringing along with her flowers cut in her garden, walked through the roads in the rain and arrived at school.

During the whole night of rain, the leaves were moistened, the asphalt road dampened, bouncing off the bright light emitted by the sun.

Sawako would usually be early for school, but she was even earlier on Mondays.

The messy bookshelf, the dirty prints on the wall, and the withered geranium (plant)...the things she had seen since the start of school, after four months, had almost been tidied by now; Sawako taped the torn books or shielded them with a plastic cover; she cleaned the dirty prints on the wall with detergents every day; she had also plucked away the dried leaves on the geranium (plant), replaced the soil with new ones, and applied fertilizers afterwards.



Since then, Sawako had always been early for school to have a look at the classroom and the corridor to see if there was something she could do to help or make the school a tidier, comfier place.

She was especially meticulous on Mondays because it was the day for everyone to greet a fresh new week. She would, before anyone had arrived at school, come to school and tidy up the classroom, although what she did were only chores like rubbing the table or checking to see if there was any trash. Today, she decided to put the flower decor she brought from her house on the teacher's table.

Before anyone had arrived at school, Sawako spotted a blue object dropped on the sports field. At first, she thought it was only a plastic bag containing junk food, so she had to, regardless, pick it up since it was her motto to 'do a good everything every day'—or even, 'do as many good things she can every day'.

But with further inspection, she found the object heavier than a plastic bag.

"A cap?"

There were traces along the periphery of the object, indicating it to be a cap. It was cap that dropped here sometime yesterday, gone through the mad rain, and thus had raked up some nasty dirt. The brown water droplets dripping from the edges of the cap dirtied Sawako's socks.

*What should I do?* Sawako pondered. The cap was too dirty to be put into the lost-and-found box in the school office. Moreover, she had no idea of whether it was thrown here as trash or someone who lost it.

Taking the wet baseball cap, Sawako walked to the sink and washed the cap thoroughly with soap.

*Perhaps someone threw it as trash, but the wet cap soaked in dirt looks as if it is crying with a sad face. I can't just leave it here; my heart will grieve if I do.*

Flipping the cap around several times, Sawako had already clean the cap both inside and outside. Having checked the dirt is cleaned away, she took baseball cap to the social information room.

"This will do."

She flattened the edges of the baseball cap, changed the shape into a round arc, and placed it on the cupboard beside the window. After that, she pushed the windows to facilitate ventilation. There were few and far between people going into this room, so placing the cap in the deepest side of the cupboard would make it difficult to be spotted.

Looking at the cleansed baseball cap, Sawako imagined whom the owner of the cap would be like: *Is it a student in this school? Or is it a student from another school who came here for the training competition? He must be a boy great at sports and full of vigour.*

The deep-blue-coloured cap lay erectly beside the window where the sun shone on it. It looked different from the time she picked it up: it looked as if it was sticking its chest out in pride.

After school, Sawako took the dried baseball cap and walked to the place where she had picked it up on this morning.

*Should I put it into the lost-and-found box, or should I take it to the baseball club and ask those members?* Sawako thought a lot, but decided finally to place the cap back to the place where she had picked it up. She first put the baseball cap in a plastic bag she had bought in a stationary store beside the school; then, she hung the plastic bag on a nearby tree. With this done, the cap wouldn't get wet even if another rain came.

Looking at the baseball cap that was shaking alongside the leaves of the tree, Sawako hoped that the cap would return to its owner. And at this moment...

"Isn't that the Sadako?"

"Yeah. She's the one rumoured to have an abnormal body."

Sawako heard the words between some girls passing nearby.

"I heard that she once called a ghost to push down the cupboard to crash on a male student."

*How did things end up like this?* It seemed as if the twisted fact had spread around the school.

"What is the Sadako doing over there? She seemed to have hung something

strange on the tree...”

“Gulp. She looked at us! Hurry, run!”

As if escaping the eyes of Sawako, the female students ran away with a tensed face.

The rumour ‘the Sadako has a powerful, abnormal body’ seemed to be known universally in the school.

Heaving a sigh lightly, Sawako began her journey back home. While everyone was returning with their friends around them, Sawako was the only one still alone till this date. Originally, she had planned to make a lot friends in middle school, but she failed.

*How long will these days last? Until the end of my first year? Or until the graduation of middle school? Will it go on forever in my life...* Sawako was accustomed to living alone. After all, she had been spending most of her time in her life on her own. Be that as it may, once the thought that she may be forever alone, she couldn’t help slowing her footsteps down and drooping her head.

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Just when the sky was darkening, after the club activities had ended and Kazenaya had bid Sanda farewell, Kazenaya walked quickly to Sawako’s school.

Kazenaya had found out he had lost his baseball cap when he had been packing his schoolbag on this morning. Rarely he would lose things, but perhaps because he had been preoccupied by the failure he made yesterday, he had returned home without checking his belongings.

If he had lost it, it would have been sometime after the competition yesterday. Although Kazenaya had told himself perhaps he wouldn’t find the cap, he still went there in hope for some luck.

Kazenaya first looked on the field he had the competition, but he hadn’t found anything similar to his cap. Just when he was thinking he wouldn’t find the cap, he unintentionally looked to a tree nearby, happening to find a deep-blue-

coloured object hanging between the leaves, swaying along the wind.

“Oh. There it is!”

Kazenaya couldn't help letting out a yell, running towards it. He quickly took the plastic bag from the branches and shrieked in surprise afterwards.

“What the...for real? Did someone really help me clean it?”

Kazenaya's cap had been a bit dusted, but the baseball cap he took out from the plastic bag looked as if it was completely new, reflecting its vivid, deep-blue colour. Kazenaya had even suspected that the cap belonged to someone else, but after detailed inspection, he found out there was still some traces of an oil-pen marks on the interiors of the cap; hence, he was sure this cap was his.

There was a huge rain yesterday, and perhaps someone might have stepped on the cap, so Kazenaya had thought that, even if he had found his cap, the cap should have been torn and dirty; he couldn't believe the cap would become even cleaner than before; he couldn't believe some stranger would do this for him.

Looking at the baseball cap, Kazenaya's tension had long left him, leaving only a relaxed state on his face. He even smiled eventually. He felt his body was light and ready for more challenges. He put on the baseball cap he had lost but now found, smelling a light scent of soap.

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On the next day after school, after Sawako had completed the sundry duties her teacher had ordered, it was already two hours past the usual time for leaving school. On her way back home, when she passed through the tree she had hung the plastic bag on, she discovered that the baseball cap was gone.

Walking closer, she found only the plastic bag hanging on the tree, but instead of the baseball cap, there was a folded piece of paper inside, seemingly torn from a notebook. Unfolding the piece of paper, she found some big words written on it with a mechanical pencil: “Thanks! I'm elated!”

*So this means the baseball cap has returned to its owner?* Sawako heaved a

sigh of relief and felt a warm feeling rushing to her chest. The words left on the sheet was filled with life and vigour. Although there were only a few words, but the liveliness between the lines represented the pure gratitude and joy of the writer. Sawako repeatedly read the message composed of only two lines. The hopes she had for the cap to return to the owner was clearly sent and received. *Who was this person who left this piece of paper? How is he like?* Though unaware, Sawako had eased her emotions, and the corner of her lips was rising...

Holding the piece of paper, Sawako lifted her head: the west sky had been dyed from gold to crimson gradually by the last glows of the setting sun.

At the same time, at a sports field in another school, Kazenaya looked upwards to the west sky. He was originally having defending exercises, yet his eyes were caught by the glows of the setting sun.

“Kazenaya! Don’t look elsewhere!” reprimanded a senior, flying a strong ball at him. Kazenaya who had come back to his senses just now, although stretched his hand in reflex to catch, but missed, the ball flying out of his glove. Kazenaya ran after the ball and sent it back to his teammates. Standing at a side, a second-year senior pouted at his behaviour, saying, “It is because of this that you would make such a silly mistake in the competition. Or should I say, you don’t deserve to be in these defending roles.”

His seniors continued to make sarcastic comments of him. Nevertheless, Kazenaya didn’t talk back to them. Rather, he brightly replied to the second-year senior, “Sorry! I will work hard. Please give me your guidance!” and bowed ninety degrees to his seniors.

“Okay, sure...”

The second-year seniors were utterly astounded. They turned their heads away both in lamentation and reluctance.

*This feeling might linger around for some time, but I will do my best to change it bit by bit. I will definitely change their way in looking at me.* Kazenaya patted his baseball cap and murmured, “Thank you.” to the one picked up his baseball cap and might also be bathing in the same sunset glow.

Under the glow of the setting sun, the commercial and residential buildings reflected sparkling light. The whole city was glowing as if golden sand was

sprinkled all over it.

The other side of the sunset glow was the coming tomorrow.

Even when there are a lot of nasty and deplorable things today, things might change tomorrow. Even when there are deplorable things that will happen tomorrow, things might change the day after that. Even when there are deplorable things that will happen by then, there will finally be a day where all these things will meet a change.

So let us do what we could today, for today is what gives meaning to tomorrow.

Folding the piece of paper and putting it into her schoolbag, Sawako murmured, "Thank you." to the one who left this piece of paper.

*Thank you. Thank you for understanding my good will.*

Despite walking back home alone, Sawako lifted her head towards the setting sun, stuck out her chest, and moved her legs to set out on her journey.

# Translation Notes

1. ↑ chaste child; a kind of female ghost originated in Japan